1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

will be known as *kyuki yumu-ka*. The Sumu have apparently taken this belief from the Miskito, and they have no distinctive name for the ill; the Rama of Nicaragua call it *yukuki*.

The sukya cures this illness after its source has been revealed to him in dreams, for the treatment differs slightly according to various animals which have caused it. But in all cases the belly of the patient is strongly massaged with animal grease (also vaseline, coconut oil), while the sukya keeps on continually a low whistle in order to induce the spirit to depart. Among the Christianized Miskito there are also some people who heal *yumu* by similar methods; they are known as *yumu yabaka uplika* "people curing yumu."[*]

Women *encients* may occasionally suffer from *kwikra yumu-ka* "pregnancy yumu"; the child is supposed to die then invariably, unless the sukya applies a treatment.

OTHER INDIGENOUS DISEASES.—Dysentery (M.: *taldura;* S.: *ka-pau*) occasionally appears in the form of an epidemic; it is generally cured by the administration of an infusion from the bark of the nance tree (*Byrsonima crassifolia* H. B. K.).

To cure diarrhea (M.: *byara plapaya;* T., P.: *ka lanin;* U.: *kawas lanaka*), the favorite remedy is an infusion prepared by boiling the bark of the mountain guava tree or the seed of the zapote or monkey apple. The Sumu also boil the rootstock (M.: *labu;* S.: *sara*) of the black or Ulwa banana.

According to the investigations carried on by the Rockefeller Foundation, hookworm is found on about 75 per cent of the Indian population living around Matagalpa. There is no doubt that it is also common among the Indians of the Mosquito Coast. Hookworm is seldom fatal, but there is progressive anemia and frequently interference with mental and physical development, causing occasionally premature death.

Children especially seem to be infected with intestinal parasites, as may be seen from their color and their enormously swollen belly; this is largely due to their habit of eating earth, charcoal, and the like.

Rheumatism (M.: *kyaia lâlwaya, dusa lâlwaya;* S.: *wakal dalanin, wakal dalanaka*) is supposed to be caused by thorns or fishbones which have been introduced into the flesh by evil spirits. The sukya pinches and kneads the afflicted spot, then makes a small incision with a glass splinter and, applying his mouth to the wound, he sucks a little and finally produces a prickle or bone, which he had carefully hidden between his teeth.

---

[*] Ziock (163) gives *yumuh* as the Miskito name for a native doctor curing with medicines. In the Carib dialects of Surinam and adjacent regions *yumu* is the name for some sort of spirit.

[i.e. yumu, or stomachache, see cat. 116, pp 119-20 – Analyst]

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

paraphernalia of these doctors, small specimens being considered more efficacious than large ones. One of these celts is wrapped around the aching part of the body in order to relieve pain. In case of stomachic troubles the sukya administers drinking water wherein such a celt had been deposited for some time.

TREATMENT.—The sukya heals generally in the dark, especially after sundown. His methods of approach are prescribed by custom. First he imposes a general fast or perhaps only minor restrictions in diet on the patient, and occasionally on some of the latter's near relations likewise. Food which the patient is allowed to eat is known as *bydinka* (M.) and *kuñ* (S.). Sometimes the sukya ties a knotted cord round the legs, arms, breast, or neck of the patient, and the latter must abstain from the use of certain food, from salt and chili pepper, and observe continence for as many days as there are knots in the cord.

The cure proper consists in whistling over the sick person, blowing tobacco smoke over him, and massaging and sucking the afflicted body parts. The sukya purifies the drinking water, or any other beverage intended for the patient, by exposing it to the dew for some time, and then blowing into it with a bamboo rod or a tobacco pipe so as to produce bubbles. Painted sticks of hardwood are stuck in the ground around the bed of the sick person in order to keep evil spirits away. The sukya walks or dances around the sick bed, singing or muttering mysterious and incomprehensible words which are supposed to belong to the "spirit language." If a remedy does not seem to do any good, the sukya tries another one, just as does his learned confrère in more civilized countries.

Nobody must pass to windward of the house where the patient is undergoing a treatment, as one would kill the latter by "robbing him of air and breath." Should these orders be trespassed the sukya will exact a fine from the guilty ones. A woman *encinta* or with an infant must also keep out of sight as she might cause the death of both patient and sukya; these same restrictions apply also to any person of either sex having assisted shortly before at a burial.

Should the sick person not become any better, or even die eventually, the sukya will claim that his instructions had not been carried out carefully. Generally he ascribes such a calamity to disobedience in food restrictions. The actual or presumed breach of the above-named injunctions affords a convenient loophole for lack of success in the treatment.

Surgical operations are sometimes practiced by the sukya with the aid of splinters from broken glass bottles or bones, and chips of flint or obsidian. As antiseptics he uses ashes, tobacco, beeswax, and gums from certain trees.

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

If the illness is not of a serious nature the sukya may cure it without seeing the patient. In such cases the remedies are administered by a third person, after having been "treated" (M.: *yabakna*) by the doctor by the usual methods of incantation.

The above-mentioned modes of cure are practiced by both Miskito and Sumu. The Sumu sukya also anoints the afflicted part of the sick in the form of a cross with a few drops of blood obtained by making a small incision under the tongue of a healthy virgin or boy with the aid of a prickle or thorn.[86]

Many sorcerers apparently believe in the efficacy of these methods, and they will practice these incantations over their own relations; when sick themselves, they will submit to such a treatment by one of their confrères. An old Miskito sukya from Rio Patuca, however, admitted to the writer that he practices all this hocus-pocus solely in order to keep the people in fear and thus be able to collect the fee.

TREATMENT OF EPIDEMICS.—In case of a very complicated and lingering disease or an epidemic the patients are isolated in provisional ranches built a short distance away from the village, in order to prevent the sickness from spreading. Green bushes or weeds are burned, and the heavy wreaths of smoke given off are supposed to act as a disinfectant. A bird or horselike figure (M. and S.: *dikutna*) is made by the sukya with sticks, leaves, clay, or wax, and he manages to lock the disease up therein after prolonged incantations. Once inside, the evil becomes incandescent and it is taken far away from the village, so that it can no longer harm the inhabitants. But should the sickness be very obstinate, the sukya orders the removal to another locality, and the infected village is burned to the ground.

CONVALESCENCE.—When the sukya has expelled the evil spirit and the patient is on the road to recovery the sukya organizes a feast to which all the inhabitants of the settlement are invited. Food and drink are offered to them. The custom is limited to the Miskito, who call this feast *pai*, a word which the Sumu apply to the sweet potato (M.: *tawa*).[87] It takes place on the eve of the day on which the patient is to leave the house of the sukya and return home again. The latter organizes everything, but all expenses are borne by the patient, who, however, has still to observe a strict diet and is not allowed to partake of any food or drink served to the guests. The feast lasts until daybreak, and no one is allowed to leave before that time, otherwise the disease with which the convalescent person was afflicted will be transferred to him. For some time after his recovery the patient's food is first brought to the sukya, who purifies it by

[86] Oviedo stated that the inhabitants of Chontales (Nicaragua) made blood offerings by piercing their tongues.

[87] It is of interest to note that according to the traditions of the Carib the spirits of the bush have a marked aversion to sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas* Poir).

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

whistling and blowing over it for about 5 or 10 minutes. Should he suffer a relapse and undergo another treatment the sukya will demand another fee.

RELIGION: SUPREME BEING, TRIBAL HEROES, SPIRITS, CREATION OF MAN, DELUGE, CHRISTIANIZATION

SUPREME BEING.—The religious system of these tribes has been fast disintegrating for the last generation. Nowadays both tribes believe in the existence of a Supreme Deity, which the Miskito call *Wan-Aisa*, "Our Father," and the Sumu *Ma-Papak* or *Ma-Papaiki*, "Our Father" or "Sun-Father." Both tribes also make use of the name *Dawan*, "Master" or "Lord." This conception has probably been borrowed from Christianity; still Exquemelin (Engl. ed.: 251) states that in his days (1671) the Miskito believed in one God. This Deity, which dwells in heaven, is sometimes confused with the various tribal heroes. According to these Indians, God has created the world and the inhabitants, but He does not appear to worry a great deal about the individual being, nor is He able to ward off the various dangers which continually menace mankind; consequently He is not honored with offerings, prayers, worship, or sacrifice. Furthermore, He lives so far away from earth that it is impossible to enter into relations with Him, and He can not be approached by man.

MINOR GODS AND TRIBAL HEROES.—Both the Miskito and the Sumu believe in the existence of a number of supernatural beings, living formerly on earth like man. These are the sun (M.: *yu, lapta;* S.: *ma*), thunder (M.: *alwani;* S.: *alwana*), moon (M.: *kati;* S.: *wiiko*), rainbow (M.: *kumadora;* S.: *wayauli, wayuli*), stars and planets (M.: *slilma;* T., P.: *yala;* U.: *ma-baka* "small sun"), the Pleiades (M.: *pupu-wihta;* S.: *kalpas*). According to a Sumu myth a bright planet, called by the Miskito *kati-maya*, "the moon's wife," which is seen just above the new moon, was originally a girl, who was raised by her finger tips by *Uda*, the moon god (Heath, c: 77). These various heavenly bodies are supposed by the Sumu to travel in canoes, a belief which is also held by the Cuna of Panama.[88]

Some of these supernatural beings are in charge of the elements and are responsible for the great calamities which appear occasionally. The god of the wind and of the air, called by the Miskito *Prahaku* or *Aubiya*,[89] sends the hurricanes and the great inundations which destroy the plantations and kill the livestock. His representative is

[88] Erland Nordenskiöld, Les Rapports entre l'Art, la Religion, et la Magie chez les Cuna et les Choco. Journal de la Société des Americanistes de Paris, tome XII, Paris, 1920, p. 150.

[89] Cf. "obi" or "obeah," a species of sorcery practiced among West Indian Negroes.

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

278 Camotillo is the Spanish name for a tuberous plant, said to be not unlike the sweetpotato vine. It is supposed to grow in a wild state in certain regions of the Mosquito Coast, in the neighborhood of the rivers, but it is known only to few persons. The tuber is dried in the sun and reduced to a fine powder by a very laborious process. After pulverization it is introduced into the food or drink of the intended victim. Death will set in after exactly as many days as the tuber in question had been extracted from the soil at the time of administration.

The Ladinos believe that many Miskito and Sumu are acquainted with this manner of disposing of an enemy, but I was unable to obtain from these Indians any reliable details pertaining to the plant. All my Indian informants denied knowing it. In 1919 the candidates for president and vice president of Honduras died several months previous to the election, and the ignorant people of that Republic ascribed their deaths to the administration of camotillo by adherents of the rival political party.

753 754 WITCH POISON.—Many Indians believe that poison can be wafted through the air to the intended victim. The fear of "buried poison" has been introduced among the Miskito by Negroes from British Honduras and Jamaica, who have settled at the coast. In fact the Miskito of Rio Coco and Honduras nowadays ascribe disease not so much to the mischief of evil spirits as to the presence of buried poison in the neighborhood of the sick person's house. This poison is supposed to have been hidden there by one of his enemies with the object of causing him to fall into some lingering disease, as dysentery, and eventually to die. Such poison, which is generally inclosed in a bottle, is said to soak through the cork, spread to the surface, and then cause disease to all the people in the neighborhood.

755 When after the administration of different remedies there is no improvement in the condition of a sick person, a "poison doctor," that is, a sukya skilled in the discovery of such witch poison, is called. The latter, upon his arrival, takes a little walk around the house, and then pretends to smell buried poison in the neighborhood. He promises to take it out if everyone in the settlement will give him a small amount of money. As the presumed bad effects of such buried poison will gradually spread to the whole village, everyone will pay his share, and the following day the sorcerer promises to do the needful. In the meantime, generally during the night, he buries a small flask of a dark liquid near the house of the sick person. In the morning the entire population of the village is present in order to witness the extraction of the source of the illness. After searching the vicinity of the house for a considerable time the sukya finally walks to the spot where he buried the small bottle during the night, and then triumphantly shouts: *Nara sa* "Here it is." He shows the

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

liquid to the people present, but none of them dares to inspect it, not being immune from its effects as are the poison doctors and the foreigners. During the last two decades the fear of buried poison has spread to the Tawira-Miskito and to the Sumu; these Indians believe that the Miskito from Rio Coco are especially dangerous on account of their habit of killing their enemies with the aid of buried poison. Certain charms, as, for instance, the bitter antidote bean (*Fevillea cordifolia*), are occasionally carried to ward off the effects of such witch poison.

DREAMS.—The Indian pays great attention to dreams (M.: *yapri sikkus*; T., P.: *amana*; U.: *amiña*). When he dreams that he has killed plenty of game he is certain to have good luck in the chase on the following morning. If he dreams of an accident he refuses to leave the settlement during the next few days. When he dreams of strangers, he expects a visit in the near future. The sukya, while curing a sick person, invokes friendly spirits in order to obtain from them during the dream information regarding the nature of the illness.

HAUNTED TREES.—The silk-cotton tree (see Religion, etc.) and the various species of figs (*Ficus* sp.), especially the giant chilamate or higuero, are said to be haunted. The Indians and Creoles believe that these fig trees flower only during the night and hold the fig to be the true fruit. Any one daring to go under the tree about midnight will be able to see the blossom and after that will be favored with good luck in anything he may attempt. This belief is shared by the ignorant Ladinos, who claim that the fig trees flower only on Good Friday night and that a blanket spread under them at midnight will be covered with small blossoms on the following morning.

MAGIC AND SORCERY: SUKYA, OKULI, SPIRITIST, OBEAH OR VOODOOISM

SHAMANS IN GENERAL.—Among these credulous people a great influence is exercised by the shamans, of which there were formerly only two categories, the *sukya* and the *okuli*. Of the latter there should be only one at a time, but of the former there is one in almost every larger village. In recent years two other sorts of shamans, the *spiritist* and the *obeah man*, have appeared on the coast.

These shamans play a great rôle in the life of the Indians, for they act as medicine men, doctors (see Hygiene: Diseases and their cure), augurs, conjurers, magicians, wizards, diviners, rain makers, spell-binders, priests, preachers, teachers, guides, advisors, counsellors, depositaries of tribal traditions, and the like. Their opinions were formerly of the greatest weight in tribal assemblies. Still, there is nothing characteristic about them in the way of ornament or dress,

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

756 catch. To most Indians the okuli is the greatest man on earth; they do not dare say anything against him, for he knows everything that goes on, no matter how far away he is.

794 THE SPIRITIST.—A new movement, not unlike the nyalism among
786 Jamaican Negroes, has appeared among the Christianized Miskito during the last 40 years. While engaged in fervent prayers, either in church or at home, certain people suddenly begin to act like mad; they shiver over the whole body, run and dance around, give out loud screams, and by other means seek to attract attention.

They claim that at such periods they have no control over their actions, and that the latter are due to the presence of the Holy Ghost in themselves. For this reason they are known among the Miskito
[155] as *pirit-uplika* "spirit men." While in this state of ecstasy they are supposed to be able to cure the sick by laying hands upon them. They also pretend having revelations from God during their dreams.

Although excluded from church membership by the Moravians, the spirit men or spirit women, for the female sex is not excluded from this office, frequent the churches. They pretend to be good Christians, and their influence is very great among the Christianized Miskito. The movement has, however, not had many followers among the Sumu. In certain districts the spiritists cause more trouble to the work of evangelization than to their heathen confrères, the sukyas. Although attributing the results of their cures directly and solely to the will of God, some of these spiritists make use of native herbs, of which they have a crude knowledge.

754 OBEAH OR VOODOOISM.—The belief in obeah (obia) was brought over from Africa by the slaves, and it still exists among the ignorant Creoles and the immigrated West Indian Negroes. The Blacks from British Honduras are especially noted as great obeah or voodoo men.

Feathers, bones, colored rags, thunderbolts (stone axes), and small bottles filled with insects and powdered earth, belong to the paraphernalia of these shamans, whose mode of working their spells does not differ essentially from that of the Indian sukya. Some of the obeah men from Jamaica or British Honduras have become sukya upon settling among the Indians of the Mosquito Coast.

The obeah men are much feared by the Creoles, Negroes, and Indians, as they are supposed to inflict bad luck, disease, and death upon an enemy. When some one is suffering from a lingering malady it is said that obeah is "on" him. His only recourse is to go to an obeah man, who will remove the evil for the payment of a sum of money. This sort of sorcery is, indeed, a very profitable business. Should the sick person die, however, the obeah man will claim that his instructions have not been carried out.

2: Kirchhoff E-4 (no date) 1948
SA15 Mosquito SA15

773 same way that manioc is planted. Some of the tribes recount a myth of a
776 great flood. The *Jicaque* believe in two benevolent deities and a female god of evil. No offerings are made to the "good" deities, but attempts are made to placate the "evil" one, a female who is responsible for all misfortune and who causes death.

775 The *Sumo* and *Mosquito* and possibly the *Paya* believe that after death the soul makes its way eastward over a difficult route to a nether world of plenty and happiness. The description of the route traveled and the acts performed by the survivors of the deceased to aid the progress of his soul on this road differ from tribe to tribe. Under certain conditions the soul may remain about the house of the deceased and even occupy his former belongings, including domestic animals. For this reason these things must be destroyed.

776 The *Sumo*, *Mosquito*, and *Paya* believe that the world is populated with
789 innumerable spirits. These haunt hills, caves, deep pools of water, and other places, and they are responsible for most misfortunes including sickness and death. A large part of the work of shamans is to placate these spirits, to drive them out of sick people, and otherwise to destroy them. Protection from the bad spirits is afforded by amulets and charms.

SHAMANISM

756 Most *Sumo* and *Mosquito* settlements have a shaman, who may take part in secular affairs but whose chief duty is to cure the sick. Shamans possess some spiritual power, but very little is known of the various rituals through which it is acquired. Sons and sometimes sons-in-law may
● 755 succeed a shaman. Curing varies in detail according to the individual shaman and the spirits addressed. A shaman goes into a trance in which he contacts the spirits and, in one way or another, drives them out of the afflicted person. Curing rituals also include songs, dances, and the use of painted sticks, carved figures, and other paraphernalia. Some diseases are cured by the imposition of diets, the prohibition of sexual intercourse, and other restrictions. Complicated diseases or village-wide epidemics are isolated and receive special medical and ceremonial treatment. Infections, snake bites, and diseases such as malaria are cured by both shamans and laymen, the latter using infusions of herbs and a large number of native medicines. Steam baths followed by a cold plunge are also employed. Baths in hot springs and partial burial in hot sand are common practices, especially among the *Sumo*. When surgery is necessary a shaman employs
[778] knives made of obsidian, flint, bone, and such. Ashes, tobacco, wax, and resin are used as antiseptics.

756 A shaman may also prophesy the future or determine the route hunters
[787] should take in order to find game. By conjuring, a shaman may cause
[754] harm to come to people. A shaman may be retained by a person to eliminate an enemy.